



Norfolk County Council

Planning and Highways Delegations Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Monday 10 June 2024
at 14:00 in County Hall, Norwich

Voting Members Present:

Cllr James Bensly
Cllr Andrew Jamieson
Cllr Graham Plant (Chair)

Non-Voting Members Present:

Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr William Nunn

Also Present:

Stephen Faulkner	Principal Planner – National Infrastructure Planning Lead Officer
Laine Tisdall	Committee Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Paul Neale and Cllr Steve Riley. Cllr Mike Sands was also absent.

2. Election of Chair for the 2024/25 Municipal Year

- 2.1 Cllr Andrew Jamieson, seconded by Cllr James Bensly, nominated Cllr Graham Plant for the position of Chair.
- 2.2 There being no other nominations, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Graham Plant be elected Chair of the Planning and Highways Delegations Committee.

3. Election of Vice-Chair for the 2024/25 Municipal Year

- 3.1 Cllr Andrew Jamieson, seconded by Cllr Graham Plant, nominated Cllr James Bensly for the position of Vice-Chair.
- 3.2 There being no other nominations, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr James Bensly be elected Vice-Chair of the Planning and Highways Delegations Committee.

4. Minutes

- 4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 8 September 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and signed by the Chair.

5. Declarations of Interest

5.1 There were no declarations of interest

6. Items of Urgent Business

6.1 There were no items of urgent business.

7. Norwich to Tilbury Overhead Power Line Proposal – Statutory Consultation by National Grid

7.1 The Committee received the annexed report (7).

7.2 The Principal Planner introduced the report, which was produced in response to the recently published statutory consultation from National Grid relating to the proposed Norwich to Tilbury electricity transmission project.

7.3 The following key points were highlighted to the Committee:

- The proposal was considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), where the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero would make the final decision due to the scale of the project.
- National Grid previously consulted Norfolk County Council on two separate occasions in 2022 and 2023, under a non-statutory consultation. The Planning and Highways Delegations Committee considered the non-statutory consultation at its September 2023 meeting, where the Committee made clear that it wanted to see an offshore option if feasible to implement. If this was not deliverable, a total undergrounding of the project between Norwich and Tilbury was favoured.
- The proposal was for a 184-kilometre transmission line between Norwich and Tilbury. At present, only 25km of the route was planned to be underground, through the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Essex. 30km of the route lay within Norfolk's boundaries, all of which was currently planned for overhead power lines. 89 pylons were required, which would stand 50 metres high and positioned 330m apart from each other.
- An extension to Norwich Main substation was also part of this NSIP proposal and was also being taken forward as a planning application under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (i.e. was being "twin-tracked" by National Grid) and had been submitted to the planning department at South Norfolk District Council.
- There had been a number of changes since the non-statutory consultation. This included provision for part undergrounding of the transmission line through the Waveney Valley and underneath the River Waveney. A series of minor alignment changes were also proposed to the route in Norfolk, to avoid planned battery storage facilities, solar farms, and sites of archaeological interest.

- During the summer of 2023, Norfolk County Council commissioned an independent report into the project alongside Essex County Council and Suffolk County Council, which conducted a review on the need to augment the transmission network in the East of England. The report concluded there was a demonstratable need to upgrade the transmission network, due to offshore wind farms coming on-stream and the approval of Sizewell C nuclear power station, along with other future power projects in the Region. The report cast doubt on the timescale for when the project was needed, suggesting that the extra capacity was required by 2035, as opposed to the 2030 deadline quoted by National Grid. The additional five years would provide enough time to review the project and consider alternatives.
- A second report, produced by the Electricity Systems Operator (ESO), was published in March 2024, four weeks before the commencement of the statutory consultation. The report considered ten alternative solutions for the transmission network, of which there were four basic categories. These were predominantly offshore, onshore overhead lines, onshore underground cables, and a hybrid onshore/offshore option. The conclusion from the ESO report stated the most economical option was overhead power lines; however, this did not take environmental concerns into account.
- If the overhead power lines were given approval, there needed to be a consideration of deliverable benefits that the project would bring to Norfolk. At present, the proposal would see power from offshore brought into Norfolk and transmitted cross-country to Essex and Greater London, with no benefits to the county. Discussions were required to see if Norfolk could tap into the power to assist residents and the local economy.
- The Waveney Valley undergrounding proposal would comprise only 2km of the 30km route within Norfolk. Officers and Local Members had stressed that much more of the transmission network needed to be underground, as it was felt that the cumulative effect of the existing 400kV pylon network in South Norfolk, along with the existing local UK Power Networks (UKPN) 132 kV network had not been sufficiently considered by National Grid.

7.4 The following points were discussed and noted:

- The Chair provided a summary of comments from the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 22 May 2024, stating that Members had considered all aspects and implications of the project on Norfolk.
- The Chair commented that he had raised concerns with National Grid that Norfolk would not benefit from the power being transmitted through the county to support planned housing and local economic growth. However, National Grid responded that they were only responsible for transmission, directing the Council to speak with UKPN to see if there was a way for Norfolk to tap into the network. Conversations were currently ongoing.

- A Committee Member stated that the project would see the village of Roydon virtually encircled with pylons, with the Local Member for Diss and Roydon expressing grave concern during the Scrutiny Committee meeting in May. Undergrounding was considered a more prudent option for Norfolk, with the Committee Member illustrating the example of a cable route within his division which was installed underground with no detrimental impact visible. There did not appear to be an assessment as to why the offshore option was not being taken up by National Grid
- A Committee Member agreed with the comments from the Scrutiny Committee, stressing that the omission of Norfolk from being a beneficiary of the transmission network needed to be resolved by National Grid directly, rather than passing the Council onto UKPN. The independent report from the three local authorities was clear that while overhead lines were the cheapest solution, this did not take into account the effects on residents and the environment.
- The Vice-Chair expressed concern regarding the impact of the project on the environment and the residents of Norfolk. It was imperative that alternative solutions were considered in full.
- The Chair stated that the Council would need to continue lobbying the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, to protect Norfolk and for the county to benefit from the project.
- The Chair stated that Recommendation 5 in the report presently read “to **WELCOME** National Grid’s proposal to underground part of the route to the west of Diss (Waveney Valley Alternative) but would like to see this underground area expanded significantly”. The Chair proposed an amendment to the recommendation, to replace “**significantly**” with the phrase “**to the full length of Norfolk.**” This amendment was unanimously **CARRIED** by Committee Members.

7.5 The Planning and Highways Delegations Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. To **RAISE** an objection to the current proposal in light of the recent ESO Study (March 2024) and the alternative transmission options outlined in that study.
2. To **ASK** National Grid to pause their current proposal and consider the alternative options with the ESO, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, and local stakeholders;
3. To **SUPPORT** in principle either an offshore option or, if this was proved undeliverable, an undergrounded onshore option.
4. To **AGREE** that on the event of an onshore option being taken forward, National Grid should commit to delivering wider benefits and opportunities to provide power to meet the needs of existing and planned growth in Norfolk and contribute towards funding an Energy Plan for the County.

5. To **WELCOME** National Grid's proposal to underground part of the route to the west of Diss (Waveney Valley Alternative) but would like to see this underground area expanded to the full length of Norfolk.
6. To **ENDORSE** the comments set out in this report and to **AGREE** for the accompanying Appendices to be sent to National Grid and the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero.

The meeting concluded at 14:26

Cllr Graham Plant, Chair
Planning and Highways Delegations Committee



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